

ABSTRACT
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A STUDY OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN RELATION TO SELF-ESTEEM,
ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL AND PEER RELATIONS.

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This study explored the statistical relationship between school attendance and self-esteem, attitudes toward school, and peer relations. To determine that a relationship existed, inferential statistics and frequency distribution were used to determine the statistical relationship between variables.

A convenience sampling of 49 high school students was utilized in studying the relationship between variables.

The major findings were that there was no significant relationship between school attendance and peer relations and attitudes toward school. However there was a relationship between school attendance and self-esteem.

A STUDY OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN RELATION TO SELF-ESTEEM
ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL AND PEER RELATIONS
IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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BY
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems in school systems across the country is improving school attendance and reducing truancy and drop-out. Teachers, school administrators and social workers grapple with the problem of how to deal with chronically absent or truant students everyday. Attending school is essential in obtaining school success. Rohrman has stated that "even though school enrollment has been increasing so has the rate of truancy."¹ This Observation further validates the concern for school absenteeism, truancy and drop-out.

In the late seventies and throughout the eighties, Americans have ranked "pupil lack of interest/truancy" as one of the top 10 problems facing schools.² This ranking demonstrates the magnitude of non-attendance among some school-aged children. Truancy is a major concern for society because it may be the bi-product of larger problems affecting truant students. Absenteeism can have serious lifelong consequences for students. It places students

¹Dan Rohrman, "Combating Truancy in Our Schools - A Community Effort," NASSP Bulletin 76 no. 549 (Jan 1993): 40.

²Ibid., 40.

risk and it places their future at-risk.³

Lack of attendance which places students at-risk also impacts employment opportunities. As society advances so does the need for higher levels of education. More and more employers are requiring post high school education when hiring employees. Even though this is a new development by the labor market, in the past three decades little or no progress has been made in improving progress in 9th graders completing graduation. In 1982, 69.7 percent of 9th graders graduated high school after four years. In 1989, 69.6 percent of 9th graders graduated after four years. There was also a slight increase to over 71 percent in 1987 and 1988. Over the past decade approximately 30 percent of students have either dropped out or have remained in high school for more than four years without graduating.⁴

Truancy is not merely a modern dilemma. As early as 1872, the problem of "early school leavers" was causing concern for school officials.⁵ However the effects of truancy are far greater now than they were then. Education is now the basis for achieving success in this competitive

³Ann Vail, "Tips for Keeping Class Cutters in School." The Vocational Educational Journal. 67 (Feb 1992): 13.

⁴Kids Count Data Book State Profiles of Child Well-Being Center For Study of Social Policy. 1992

⁵Ibid., 40.

country.

Many programs have been developed to combat this problem of poor attendance which leads to truancy. The programs range in content from automated telephone calls to the homes of absent students to providing money as an incentive to previously truant students. Each year, teachers and administrators are challenged to develop an attendance improvement plan for their school. Still, attendance percentages continue to drop.⁶

There are many suggested reasons for why children do not go to school. Researchers have attempted to study the socio-economic background of truant students. Some have attempted to study the family nucleus as to whether the two parent as opposed to single parent homes has any effect on school attendance.

Studies on school attendance center around the socio-economic status of the adolescent and the nucleus of the family. Few studies show the relation of self-esteem, attitudes toward school and peer relations and their relationship to school attendance. This study will explore these factors.

Statement of the Problem

School attendance is an essential part of school

⁶Harold D. Greer, "Improving Attendance in Urban Schools: An Educational Priority," NASSP Bulletin 76 (September 1992): 126.

success. It is presumed that if one attends school regularly one will gain the necessary tools for success offered by the educational system. Yet if one does not attend school or is truant and even worse drops-out one will not gain the necessary tools for success. Each year parents, teachers, school administrators and social workers are challenged to remedy problems associated with children who do not attend school.

Many researchers have looked to socio-economic status as one of the major factors associated with poor attendance. According to a study conducted by the American College Testing, students from low-income families remain much less likely than those from high income families to attend and graduate high school.⁷ Studies on the family nucleus have also been conducted. Many students who have difficulties with attendance come from single parent homes or broken homes.⁸

While researchers look towards economics and family backgrounds of absent students as external factors relating to poor attendance, few have evaluated internal factors and there relationship to poor school attendance. Although external factors are important it is essential to know that

⁷Susan Kraft, "Does Federal Aid Help Low-Income Students?" American Demographics 13 (July 1991): 18.

⁸Greer, "Improving Attendance In Urban Schools," 126.

external factors can have an influence on the internal. It is important to know how a student feels about himself, school and peers.

There are three parts of the lives of the student that have not been fully explored they are; self-esteem, attitudes towards school and peer relations. Respect and feelings for oneself or self-esteem may possibly play some role in how a student feels about going to school or not going to school. In high school relationships among peers is important as this is a period of growth, learning and decision making.

Many researchers have proposed that self-esteem is what drives people to succeed. Schmoker expressed that our feelings about ourselves are intimately connected to effort and accomplishment.⁹ Many school systems have tried to develop curriculum geared toward self-esteem. Building a sense of belonging and a supportive environment is sought as a means of increasing self-esteem and achievement.¹⁰ Cuban stated that it has been found that high self-esteem has a strong relationship with success. If this is so it could be presumed that those with high self-esteem would less likely miss school, and those with low self-esteem would more likely miss school.

⁹Schmoker, "What Really Promotes Self-Esteem?" 94.

¹⁰Larry Cuban, "What Can Be Done for At-Risk Students," Educational Digest 54 (May 1989):4.

Also, when evaluating poor attendance it is would seem necessary to look at peer relations. The years spent by youth in high school are filled with many learning experiences. These experiences usually center around relations between peers. While being accepted by a group is important to everyone, finding the right group is even more important. Friends are a big part of high school life. Studies have shown that children who have poor attendance tend to have few friends who are regular attenders. This would seem important when students exhibit poor attendance behavior. Forming friendship with regular attenders and teachers would more likely provide these students with sense of belonging and security they seek.¹¹

According to Tanner, studies have shown attitudes towards school come from the notion that attitudes vary according to socio-economic status. The feeling is that students from low income families are less likely to have positive attitudes toward school. This feeling is reinforced by the Learnfare program which cut welfare payments if children were absent from school.¹² Attitudes toward school whether negative or positive may have some effect on the desire to attend school.

¹¹Rohrman, "Combating Truancy in Our Schools" 41.

¹²Robert Kasten Jr., "Wisconsin Learnfare and Federal Waivers" Public Welfare (Spring 1992): 12.

Purpose/Significance of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of the variables, self-esteem, attitudes toward school and peer relations on school attendance. If there is such a relationship between self-esteem, attitudes toward school and school attendance, implications for further research should be considered.

The study is important because it will provide insight as to whether self-esteem, attitudes toward school and peer relations in relation to school attendance is a major area of concern for social workers and other professionals.

Practice for the social work professional is constantly changing as the problems and/or needs of the society change. Research is needed to provide foundation for policies, programs, and practice. This particular study may provide social work agencies with knowledge of possibly significantly related factors to school attendance. This is especially important for the school social worker, who may specifically be dealing with cases related to school attendance.

The implications of this study might also provide reasoning for different approaches to practice or different programs in relation to those children who have school attendance problems.

This study is important to the researcher because the problem of poor school attendance is simply not just a

symptom of socio-economics or single parent families. But, that children who do not attend school may have a poor self concept or feel they have few or no friends or simply do not like school. If self-esteem, attitudes toward school and peer relation have a significant relationship to school attendance then approaches to school attendance should be evaluated based on these factors.

The researcher's observations of junior high and high schools in urban areas were important in sparking interest in school attendance. Many of the teachers and administrators proposed that if students attended school consistently everyday, less time would be spent on getting them to school. If less time is spent by teachers and administrators getting the students to school more time can be spent on educating the students.

The researcher has noted that students who returned to school after missing a number of days seemed overwhelmed and discouraged by all of the work they would have to make up. Students also seemed more discouraged when they realized that they have fallen so far behind that they will have to repeat a grade.

It is very disheartening to see a student get so discouraged that they consider dropping-out. The researcher was prompted to do this study based on the observations and possible implications for social work.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing literature on the subject of school attendance has centered around truancy and drop-outs. Very few articles examined school attendance. Thus, it is necessary that a discussion of truancy and drop-outs be examined as they are the results of non-school attendance. The literature review will proceed with discussions of the historical overview and theoretical conceptualization followed by related research on; (1) self-esteem and school attendance (4) attitudes toward school (5) peer relations and school attendance (6) theoretical framework.

Historical Overview

Historically, discussions of poor attendance and truancy have centered around child labor and segregation. According to Briggs and Walters studies have shown that in the early stages of industrialization, working class families often needed the labor contributions of several family members including children. Children had ample work opportunities in certain industries which was needed for survival.

¹Carl M. Briggs, Pamela Barnhouse Walters, "The Family Economy, Child Labor, and Schooling: Evidence from the Early Twentieth Century South" American Sociological Review 58 (April 1993):163

In the early twentieth century a phenomenon was occurring in urban and rural areas. Walter and Briggs found that school attendance, while affected by industrialization, primarily depended on the economic resources of the family. If families had no use for children economically they would be sent to school. Walter and Briggs cite that socio-economic status definitely has a link with educational outcomes.

Walter and Briggs also suggested that racial inequalities and segregation in the early part of the twentieth century also determined schooling as well as employment. White children were more likely to be employed in textiles which made it harder to attend school than black children who usually did agricultural work. Although it may have been easier for black children to enroll in school, black families lacked resources. Through segregation the society viewed educating blacks as a non-priority. Therefore, the most important factor producing the racial differences in school enrollment was inequities in educational opportunities.²

However Margo and Finegan contend that while industrialization and segregation played a major role in school attendance among blacks, another key component was

²Briggs and Walters, "The Family Economy Child Labor" 163.

occurring. Through their study of child labor and schooling in the early twentieth century Margo and Finegan found that enrollment of white students began to increase steadily after the enactment of the compulsory school attendance law while black children did not experience a true increase until 1950. Yet Margo and Finegan found that black school participation had actually been increasing throughout the early part of the century until 1950. The researchers found that from 1900-1950 the rate of participation of black children in the labor force fell on average of 5 percent per decade. In 1950 two major events occurred, the creation of agricultural machines and the increase of minimum wage. In addition to these events a civil rights evolution was occurring. Blacks were now demanding that educational opportunities be adequate and available. Therefore between 1950 and 1970 the participation of black children in the labor force declined 48 percent.³

Currently the enrollment on a steady increase it has dumbfounded many school administrators as to why poor attendance is on an increase.

In the last decade the amount of students not graduating from high school has not increased for the country as a whole. But in evaluating each state 28, states

³Robert A. Margo and T. Alderich Finegan, "The Decline in Black Teenage Labor-Force Participation in the South, 1900-1970," The American Economic Review 83 (March 1993): 234.

made modest improvements in high school while 21 states and the District of Columbia showed decreases in the amount of students graduating.⁴

In the state of Georgia between 1982 and 1989 there was a decrease of 8% in the amount of students graduating from high school.⁵ In the Atlanta area the cumulative average daily attendance decreased from 90.8% in 1985 to 85.6% in 1992. Therefore the number of students attending regularly has gone down.⁶

Theoretical Conceptualization

The ecological systems theory suggest that individuals are engaged in constant transitions with other human beings and with other systems in the environment and that these various periods and systems reciprocally influence each other.⁷

Ecological systems theory is very useful in understanding how industrialization and segregation affected school attendance. Children were unable to attend school due to the constraints of society. During this time that

⁴Kids Count Book Data Book 25.

⁵Ibid., 43.

⁶Atlanta School District Board of Education, Statistical Report School Year 1991-92. (Atlanta Georgia), 13.

⁷Dean H. Hepworth and Jo Ann Larson. "Direct Social Work Practice Theory and Skill 3rd Ed., Belmont:(Wardsworth Publishing Co. 1990): 16.

was not beneficial for children to attend school but more beneficial for them to provide or contribute income to their households. Gaps in the environmental resources, deficiencies in individuals who need or utilize these resources, or dysfunctional transaction between individuals and environmental systems block the fulfillment of human needs and lead to stress or impaired functioning.⁸ An ecological view focuses on the social ecology of a community.⁹

The psychosocial perspective is based on a blend of concepts from psychiatry, psychology, and the social sciences. This perspective evaluates the functioning of the individual in dealing with environmental, interpersonal and intrapsychic dilemmas.¹⁰

Self-Esteem in Relation to School Attendance

Self-esteem is an important aspect of our lives. How one feels about himself guides the way he conducts himself, reaches goals, and strives to do better or not to succeed at all. Researchers have evaluated self-esteem in many different ways. The differences vary from the conclusion

⁸Ibid., 17.

⁹Jennifer Clancy, "An Ecological Approach to School Social Work." Social Work Perspectives. 4 no.1 (Spring 1993):38.

¹⁰Mary E. Woods and Florence Hollis, Casework A Psychosocial Therapy 4th ed. New York:(McGraw-Hill 1990): 24.

that esteem is the result of cognitive development, to ecological influences on self-esteem really does not exist.

Mulls, Mulls and Normandin conducted research on a sample of 162 high school students over a three year period during high school. In conducting their research they examined the developmental nature of self-esteem with age to determine the mediational effects of social class and gender on self-esteem. By controlling age effects and examining the influence of each of these variables over a three year period.¹¹ In conducting this study Mulls, Mulls and Normandin found that self-esteem increased with age. The most critical period seemed to be in the 9th grade as adolescents go through a transition from junior high to high school. This supports the cognitive development theory which contends that self-esteem changes as a function of qualitative differences in the structure of the child's processes with age.¹² Mulls, Mulls and Normandin also examined social economic status but found that this was not as significant a factor as age in relation to self-esteem.

Block and Robins agree that self-esteem increased with age. Yet, they found that self-esteem depends on socialization. The researchers examined socialization by

¹¹Ann K. Mulls, Ronald L. Mulls and Dolores Normandin, "Cross-sectional and Longitudinal Comparisons of Adolescent Self-Esteem," Adolescence 27 (Spring 1992): 52.

¹²Ibid., 57.

conducting a study on self-esteem and gender. In their study of 47 girls and 44 boys developmental changes were examined in relation to self-esteem. Also examined was the biosocial transition that adolescents go through while going from childhood to adulthood.

Many factors occur as adolescents go from childhood to adulthood. The bodies of children change during the pubescent period. During this period the mind of an adolescent may reflect an adolescent but the body may reflect an adult. This produces many processes for an adolescent to go through ready or not.

Development proceeds through a complex process that involves the mutual influences of a person's innate characteristics, family experiences, peer interactions, social roles, cultural environment, and the fortunes that impinge upon a life.¹³ Block and Robin proposed that self-esteem would vary according to gender due to socialization. Block and Robins found that the self-esteem of boys tended to increase while the self-esteem of girls decreased. It was also found that girls tend to increase in depressive affect so that by late adolescent that girl would exhibit more depressive affect than boys. Also, and more importantly it was found that self-esteem is related to

¹³Jack Block and Richard W. Robin, "A Longitudinal Study of Consistency and Change in Self-Esteem From Early Adolescence to Early Adulthood," Child Development 64 (June 1993): 909.

gender differences due to socialization. It is the notion that females are socialized to get along while males are socialized to get ahead.¹⁴

Therefore the researchers support the position that development affects self-esteem. This study also suggest that socialization has a lot to do with how self-esteem is molded in adolescence. Block and Robins suggest that more research should be done in this area to better deal with how to treat adolescents who might have problems with self-esteem.

While the two previous studies mentioned the developmental process and socialization affects on self-esteem, it is also necessary to examine research that comes from an ecological perspective.

In a study conducted by Fertman and Chubbs, exploration into the role of adolescents, families, school and community were examined to evaluate the effects of a psychoeducational program on adolescent participation and self-esteem. The study consisted of a proponent of the ecological perspective which holds that community and school activities are a product of interactions between adolescents, families, schools nd communities.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., 920.

¹⁵Carl F. Fertman and Nancy Chubb, "The Effects of a Psychoeducational Program on Adolescents' Activity Involvement in Self-Esteem and Locus of Control." Adolescence 27 (Fall 1992): 518.

Fertman and Chubbs also indicate that community, families and schools communicate to their adolescents in many ways. This process of socialization is essential in understanding how the adolescent operates in the environment. Therefore the researchers conducted a study in which they implemented activities and increased involvement in the community. Yet, there was no significant difference in the scores in the pre and post-test in relation to self-esteem. Self-esteem remained basically the same after the nine month period. This finding is very important but Fertman and Chubb stated that results may have been different if the population was not strictly volunteer.

Finally Beane evaluates whether the notion of self-esteem is even important. Beane feels that many researchers over glorify self-esteem. He feels that school success can be created through a positive environment regardless of how a child feels about himself. He buys into the dubious research that tells states that failure in our schools doesn't transfer to the fundamental sense of self-esteem nor does success.¹⁶ Schmoker adamantly disagrees with this notion, Schmoker feels that feelings about oneself are intimately connected to effort and accomplishment.¹⁷

The level of self-esteem is necessary to evaluate when looking at any part of the life of an adolescent. School

¹⁶Schmoker, "What Really Promotes Self-Esteem." 94.

¹⁷Ibid., 94.

attendance is a major part of the life of an adolescent. School is where a majority of a child's time is spent. This is the place where most of the learning occurs about society. Self-esteem in this study is fundamental based on the notion that self-esteem or self-worth or self-respect plays a major role in motivation. As stated earlier by Mullis, Mullis, and Normandin self-esteem increases with age which is essential due to the reality that school attendance becomes more of a problem at the high school level.

Attitude Toward School

The attitude of an adolescent can determine the way one views certain issues. For instance attitudes toward femininity may determine whether a girl wears a dress as opposed to pants. During the period of adolescence many attitudes of youth are changing. The developmental period an adolescent may go through periods of feeling good about being friends with members of the opposite sex. While in another part of development this attitude might be that of disgust for a member of the opposite sex. It is therefore important look at factors such as a students attitudes toward school and how it relates to school attendance.

Research on attitudes toward school is very limited. Research has largely dealt with what were the students attitudes when contemplating dropping-out. This allows one to conclude that attitudes may have been different while in

school. As interviews with drop-outs consistently confirm, most school drop-outs leave the system because they lack interest in what the schools are designed to teach.¹⁸

Toby conducted research on why some students drop-out of school. In doing research this Toby conducted interviews with students who dropped-out. Many of the attitudes and feelings about school were negative. Some students felt that school was boring, teachers did not know anything and administrators were too strict. Toby also found that some students went to school just to cause trouble. They enjoyed going to school to sit in the lunch room with friends, smoke in the restroom, harass the inexperienced young teacher and playing during gym. Also, when these students were asked about school work the response was "who needs school work".¹⁹

Toby was also interested in the fact that some of the more successful Americans were able to succeed without a high school diploma. Which indicates that the educational curriculum may not be challenging enough for those students who are exceptionally gifted. This is not to say that all of the students who drop-out have this dilemma. Some high school students do drop-out with no future plans or goals which may differ from an exceptionally gifted child who can

¹⁸Jackson Toby, "Of Drop-outs and Stay-ins: The Gershwin Approach," Public Interest 95 (Spring 1989): 4.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 7.

succeed without formal education.

The author also suggest that schools should shy away from stay-ins. Stay-ins are students who come to school and do nothing as far school work. These students may be very disruptive in the school or they cause very little trouble. Schools may decide not to put these students out because particular policies which state you cannot put a student out because he fails the 9th grade three times. Toby asserts that this is a problem because the students can become distractions to teachers and/or students. Toby states that the implications of this logic horrifies most Americans, in order for school to be safer and more focused on education instead of discipline, some children ought to drop-out.²⁰

Therefore positive attitudes toward school have a profound effect on how a student participates int he educational process. However the researcher contends that if the attitude is negative the student is less likely to participate in the educational process and more likely be distracted by things other than school.

Armor and Toby also conclude that students drop-out because by definition mass education cannot appeal to every youngster.²¹

Unlike Toby who assets that the educational system does

²⁰Ibid., 9.

²¹David Armor and Jackson Toby, "Carrots or Sticks for High School Dropouts." Public Interest 106 (Winter 1992): 77.

not appeal to everyone, Tanner suggest that attitudes toward school may depend on economic status. Tanner conducted a study on students in Edmonton, Canada who had recently dropped-out of school. The majority of the drop-outs were from working class neighborhoods. By using self reported determinates of early leaving, attitudes toward school and post-school work experiences, Toby was able to develop the come to the following conclusions.

The author found that the working class status plays a large role in determining the attitudes of the drop-out. Willis totally disagrees with this assumption. He feels that students from the working class choose to remain in that status because of the values of the working class culture. Also the values and ideals of this culture lead them to disregard white collar jobs because it does not exhibit the same signs of hard work as does manual labor. Willis also states that this analysis is a deliberate antidote to those structural accounts of schooling that depict educational failure as something that is imposed upon working class adolescents.²² Willis also goes on to say that such accounts are unduly mechanistic and deterministic and ignore the issue of how working class adolescents experience school and how other orientations do affect their

²²Julian Tanner, "Reluctant Rebels: A Case Study of Edmonton High School Drop-Outs." Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 27 (Feb 1990): 76.

educational performance.²³

At the completion of Tanner's study it was found that school based reasons were the most self-reported explanations for dropping-out.²⁴ Drop-outs objected to particular styles of teaching, specific subjects, the irrelevance of some subjects and receiving poor grades. Another finding was also that those who dropped-out had few friends who were in school, suggesting that peer relations also plays an important role in attitudes toward school.

Tanner's research gives implications for further research in attitudes toward school and peer relations of students who have dropped out.

Peer Relations

Very little literature exist on peer relations and school attendance. However there is related literature on peer relations and psychosocial problems and peer relations and delinquency.

Rohrman suggest that students who are absent from school chronically tend have as many friends at school as regular attenders but, they have few or no mainstream friends at school. When evaluating the relationship among peers in a high school setting it is necessary to evaluate a major component of these relations, peer pressure. While in

²³Ibid., 76.

²⁴Ibid., 89.

high school teens try to find their niche by associating with a particular group. According an article in Current Health, being accepted by a group is also important for every one. And for some finding the right group is even more important. Friends are a big part of junior high and high school life.²⁵

In a study on the relationship of adolescent peer groups and psychosocial problems conducted by Downs and Rose, the finding was that the peer group with the least participation in school had high levels of psychosocial problems.²⁶ The study was conducted by examining four different peer groups. These groups were divided according to academics and school involvement. The group with the least amount of involvement exhibited higher signs of psychosocial problems.

Downs and Rose found that the group had no school involvement was cause for the other peer groups to isolate themselves from this delinquent group. Another very important factor is that the students in this study labeled each other. Three out of the four groups had positive names while the forth group had a very negative name. This labeling by peers may contribute to the feeling of isolation by the group with the least amount of school involvement.

²⁵Under Peer Pressure Current Health 2 19 (sept 1992): 4.

²⁶William R. Downs and Steven R. Rose, "The Relationship of Adolescent Peer Groups To The Incidence of Psychosocial Problems." Adolescence 26 (Summer 1991): 473.

This just compounds the reasons for the non-active group to be more inactive.

The psychosocial problems of this group cover an entire range of deviant behavior and mental health concerns.²⁷

According to Constable, the child developmentalists stress that it is through a child's interactions with peers that many of life's necessary behaviors are acquired.²⁸

Therefore during high school the relationship among peers has a profound impact on the way a student copes with the stressors of high school. The need to feel accepted by the peers of choice is an essential part of growing up.

Theoretical Framework

The ecological systems theory with a developmental perspective is necessary in guiding this research. The ecological systems theory suggest that individuals are in constant transitions with the different systems and environment around them. The developmental perspective, based on Erikson's stages of development, asserts that as individuals go through stages of change while passing to childhood, adulthood and old age.

In using the ecological systems theory with a developmental perspective guides an understanding of how an

²⁷Ibid., 489.

²⁸Robert Constable, John P, Flynn and Shirley McDonald, "School Social Work Practice and Research Perspectives," 2nd ed. (Chicago: Lyceum Books 1991), 246.

adolescent goes through individual changes and social changes. Though children develop differently they are confronted by some of the same aspects of life when growing up. The development of a child can play a major role in how a child deals with the different systems around them.

In regards to self-esteem the ecological theory is useful in understanding how the environment can have an affect on the way one thinks about oneself. Although the environment may have an effect on one's feelings toward self, the development of that person may determine the way the environment affects the person.

In evaluating school attendance in relation to attitudes toward school and peer relations. The ecological theory with a developmental perspective was useful in understanding the environmental systems of school and peer relations and the developmental aspects of self-esteem and attitudes.

Definition of Terms

1. School Attendance: The act of attending school on the appropriate days times and at the appropriate hour as required by the the compulsory school attendance law.
2. Truancy: The unlawful absence from school according to compulsory school attendance law (according to Georgia law) states:

Every parent, guardian or other person residing within the State of Georgia, having control or charge of any child or children between their seventh and sixteenth birthdays, shall enroll and send such child or children to a public or private school under such penalty for non-compliance herewith as is hereinafter provided.²⁹

3. Self-esteem: The extent to which one perceives oneself as relatively close to being the person one wants to be based on feelings of self-worth, self-love and self-respect.
4. Attitude: The feeling positive or negative about someone, school or type of activity.
5. Peer Relations: The interactions with others of equal status such as having the age, likes and dislikes, values and ideas.

Statement of the Hypothesis

1. There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and school attendance.
2. There is no significant relationship between attitudes towards school and school attendance.
3. There is no significant relationship between peer relations and school attendance.

²⁹Georgia Compulsory School Attendance Law, By Laws Rules and Regulations of the Board of Education. (Atlanta Georgia), 62.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A correlational design study was used to guide the research direction of this study. This design tests the degree of relationship between two or more quantifiable variables. In this study school attendance was tested for the percentage of relationship with the independent variables self-esteem, attitudes toward school and peer relations.

SITE/SETTING

An Atlanta area metropolitan high school was the location for the study. This location was chosen through research of archival data which demonstrated that this particular high school had a high absentee problem.¹ The school is located in an urban area. The school is surrounded by three public housing projects. The three housing projects make up the majority of the population of the school. There 440 students currently enrolled at this school. On a daily average 150-170 students are absent.

¹Atlanta School District Board of Education, Statistical Report School Year 1991-1992. (Atlanta, Georgia), 13.

SAMPLING

Convenience sampling technique was used in this study to collect data from the high school students. This is a non-probability sampling technique. With this sampling technique questionnaires will be given to the closest and most available students.

INSTRUMENTATION

The Questionnaire on Self-Esteem, Attitudes Toward School and Peer Relations on School Attendance as shown in appendix A is comprised of 34 questions. Twenty questions were adopted from Hudson's Clinical Measurement Package, primarily the Index of Self-Esteem and Peer Relations was used.² Also questions were adapted from Martin Cohn, Ph.d questions on attitudes toward school.³

DATA COLLECTION

The self-administered questionnaire on self-esteem, attitudes toward school and peer relations on school attendance was given to students during lunch hour. During the lunch hour students are permitted to be in two parts of

²Martin Bloom and Joel Fischer, Evaluating Practice: Guidelines for the Accountable Professional. New Jersey: (Prentice Hall Inc. 1993): 84.

³Marvin Cohn, Helping Your Teenage Student - What Parents Can Do to Improve Reading and Study Skills, New York: E.P. Dutton 1979.

the school the cafeteria and the library. Questionnaires were passed out to students during the lunch hour. Students were informed by the researcher to ask questions about questionnaire if needed. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire during the lunch hour. Questionnaire was given to all students that consented to complete questionnaire.

DATA ANALYSIS

To evaluate data in this study Chi Square was used to test the level of significance in the relationship between variables school attendance and self-esteem attitudes toward school and school attendance. Frequencies was computed to show the number of times each score occurred. Inferential statistics were used to show relationship among the variables.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The presentation of results begins with the demographics of the population used in the sample. The second part of the presentation is of the amount of days absent as responded by the population. The third part of represents the correlation between variables using the mean and standard deviation of the scores. The last part of the presentation of results is the relationship between variables. The use of Pearson(r) was used which represents the level of significant relationship between variables.

Demographics

The demographic section of the results is comprised of age and race of the respondents. The results are displayed according to the frequency distribution of responses. The race of the 49 respondents was completely black. The age of the respondents ranged from 14-19 as represented in table 1.

Table 1.--Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
14	3	6.1
15	8	16.3
16	13	26.5
17	16	32.7
18	7	14.3
19	2	4.1
Total	49	100.0

Note: This is the distribution of age of the respondents.
Total N = 49.

The average age for the respondents was 16.4. The majority of the respondents were 16 years of age which is 26.5% of the population and 17 years of age which is 32.7% of the population. The respondents who were 14 made up 6.1% of the data and those who were 15 made up 16.3% of the data. Respondents who were 18 made up 14.3% of the data and those who were 19 made up 4.1% of the data.

The dependent variable is school attendance which was examined in relation to the independent variables self-esteem, attitudes toward school and school attendance.

Days Absent From School

The days absent from school is displayed by the number of days absent ranging from 0-6 days absent in a two week period. Frequency distribution is used to display the number of days absent by the respondents and the percentage of respondents who displayed the same answer.

Table 2.--Days Absent From School In Previous Two Weeks

Days Absent	Frequency	Percentage
0	6	12.2
1-2	26	53.1
3-4	9	18.4
4-5	4	8.2
5-6	1	2.0
6 or more	3	6.1
Total	49	100.0

Note: The number of days absent ranged from 0-6 or more.
Total N = 49.

Of the 49 respondents only 6 which is 12.2 percent of the population reported missing zero days of school in the previous two weeks. The majority of the respondents which is 53 percent of the population reported missing one to two days of school in the previous two weeks. Respondents who reported missing three to four days a week accounted for only 18.4 percent of the population. Small percentages reported missing 4 or more days, those who missed 4-5 days accompanied for 8.2 percent of the population. Those respondents who missed 5-6 days accompanied for 2 percent of the population and those who missed 6 days or more accompanied for 6.1 percent of the population.

Correlation Between Variables

The standard deviation represents how much on average the individual scores departed from the mean or average score.

Table 3.--Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Days Absent	2.28	1.79
Self-Esteem	26.15	3.59
Peer Relations	24.68	3.67
School Attitudes	25.95	3.77

Note: Standard Deviation of Responses in relation to the mean score of responses.

The days absent showed a standard deviation was 1.79, which is how much that score departed from the average 2.28. The standard deviation for self-esteem was 3.59 which is how much that score departed from the average 26.15. The standard deviation for peer relations 3.67 which is how much that score departed from the average 24.68. The standard deviation for attitudes toward school is 3.77 which is how much the score departed from the average 25.95.

Relationship Between Variables

The Pearson(r) and probability represent the level of significant relationship between school attendance and the variables self-esteem, attitudes toward school and peer relations.

Table 4.--Pearson(r) and Probability

Variables	Pearson(r)	Probability
Self-Esteem	.3248	.030
Peer Relations	-.0240	.876
School Attitudes	.1161	.448

As shown in Table 4, the Pearson(r) correlation analysis of self-esteem and school attendance produced a

Pearson(r) of .3248 with a probability of .030. Therefore the null hypothesis states that self-esteem has no significant relationship with school attendance. Due the fact that the probability is less than .05 the null hypothesis is rejected.

The Pearson(r) correlation analysis of peer relations and school attendance produced a Pearson(r) of $-.0240$ with a probability of .876. The null hypothesis states that peer relations has no significant relationship to school attendance. The null hypothesis is accepted because the probability is higher than .05.

The Pearson(r) correlation analysis of attitudes toward school and school attendance produced a Pearson(r) of .1161 with a probability of .448. The null hypothesis states that attitudes toward school has no significant relationship to school attendance. The null hypothesis is accepted because it is higher than .05.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

INTERPRETATIONS OF DATA

The data has shown that there is no significant relationship between the dependent variable school attendance and the independent variables attitudes toward school and peer relations. Yet, there is some relationship between school attendance and self-esteem.

There may be various reasons for why school attendance and self-esteem exhibited some relationship. High school students are faced with many issues which help shape their identity. Although one may like school and have many friends at school there still may be some apprehension in attending school. Rohrman suggest that in terms of self-esteem truants and drop-outs consider themselves less powerful, virtuous, physically attractive, and competent than regular attenders.¹

Attending school regularly and succeeding at school may be a pressure too great for someone with a low self-worth. Low self-esteem has some relationship to how one determines what success is or is not for oneself.

In looking at the relationship of self-esteem and school attendance the developmental perspective leads the

¹Rohrman, "Combating Truancy in Schools", 43.

researcher to conclude that self-esteem is largely due to the way one sees himself and how others see him.

Development during the high school years is a period of the forming of value systems, ways of thinking and ways of interpreting for the adolescent. Self-esteem plays a large role in this development because it determines how these value systems, thoughts and interpretations apply to self and others. For example, one may value education for a sibling yet, one may not value education for self.

Therefore, self-esteem may have some pending force with school attendance or the lack there of.

Peer relations and attitudes toward school were found to have no significant relationship with school attendance. From the ecological perspective this would be highly likely. The fact that there is no relationship does not suggest that the school or school system has no influence on school attendance. This may suggest that some students may attend school regardless of their attitudes toward school and their peer relationships. This view allows the researcher to conclude that systems can possibly systems have an effect on individuals regardless of how they feel about the system.

Yet as Tanner has stated the attitudes toward school based on economic status can have some relationship towards school attendance or the reasoning for dropping out of

school.² The researcher concludes that although there was no significant relationship between school attendance and attitudes toward school there is still a possibility that attitudes play a role in decision making in regards to school.

Peer relations in regards to school attendance was also found to have no significant relationship with school attendance. Yet Rohrman suggest that students who are absent from school frequently tend to have many friends at school but, have few friends who are highly involved in school activities.³

In agreement with Rohrman, the researcher asserts that students who frequently miss school do not allow themselves time to make friends with those students who are active in school. By not making these friends it is not likely that active students will be able to influence the student who is not active.

However the most important findings in this study is that most students missed 1-2 days within a two week period. If these days were multiplied by the number of weeks in a school year, many of these students are missing a lot of school and would be considered truant by some educational systems.

²Tanner, "Reluctant Rebels: A Case Study," 76.

³Rohrman, "Combating Truancy in Our Schools," 42.

Limitations of Study

The researcher found that the literature on the issues of self-esteem attitudes toward school and peer relations in relation to school attendance to be very limited.

Also, the sample population of the respondents was limited to African-Americans. This homogeneous population may not be applicable to the larger heterogeneous population. Results may have been different if a more heterogeneous population was used in the study.

The number of respondents in the sample size is small and therefore difficult to apply to the larger population as opposed to a large sample size.

The distribution of the questionnaires in the cafeteria was very difficult. This setting was not conducive for respondents to be attentive to the survey.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

The major implication for social work as a result of this study is that the social work profession needs to be in the forefront of combating problems with school attendance, truancy and drop-out.

These issues should not be solely left up to teachers, principals, administrators and parents. In conducting this study many of the research points to problems associated with socio-economic status in regards to school attendance. Kurtz and Barth assert that school social workers often feel that their training and role provide a stronger basis and opportunity for working with parents than those of teachers or other pupil personnel professionals who focus on school-based developmental counseling or testing.¹

According to Clancy applying an ecological perspective to school based social work means focusing on the point where independent systems or groups meet and interact.² In order to create real change, school social worker must design innovative practices that are inclusive of all of the

¹David P. Kurtz and Richard P. Barth, "Parent Involvement: Cornerstone of School Social Work Practice," Social Work 34 (September 1989): 407.

²Clancy, "Ecological Approach to School Social Work," 38.

systems affecting pupils lives.³

Another implication for social work is the need for services provided to children with self-esteem problems. Social workers can provide practice ideas on how to deal with issues regarding self-esteem. In dealing with self-esteem the developmental perspective is a suggested useful tool for understanding problems that may be associated with self-esteem.

Further study should also be done on the topic of school attendance in relation to factors other than self-esteem, attitudes toward school and peer relations. It would be helpful to the knowledge and practice base if this further research was done by social workers.

The field of social work is a fundamental resource to school aged children. The resources provided by social worker's are immense and go far and beyond monitoring school attendance.

³Ibid., 38.

Appendix A

CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Dear High School Student,

I am currently in the Master's Degree Program at Clark Atlanta University School of Social Work. To complete my requirements needed to obtain the Master's degree, I am conducting a study on school attendance. The enclosed questionnaire is designed to obtain information about school attendance in relation to different social characteristics. Please complete the attached questionnaire to assist me in my research. The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes.

Please try to answer questions as accurately and honestly as possible. Answers to questions will be totally anonymous.

By conducting this research I hope to create a better understanding of issues related to school attendance. Your cooperation in completing the questionnaire is greatly appreciated. If you would like to know the results of the study or have any questions about the questionnaire, please contact me at Clark Atlanta University School of Social Work (404)880-8550.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Quarma Cook
Researcher

cc: Professor Naomi T. Ward
Research Advisor

Appendix B

Questionnaire on Self-Esteem, Attitudes Toward School and Peer Relations on School Attendance

Please answer each question by placing a check mark following each question (one check per question). Try to answer each question as honestly and accurately as possible.

I. Demographics and School Attendance

1. Age_____
2. Race or Ethnic Background
 - Black_____
 - White_____
 - Hispanic_____
 - Other_____
3. How many days were you absent from school during the last two weeks?
 - 1-2 days_____
 - 3-4 days_____
 - 4-5 days_____
 - 5-6 days_____
 - 6 days or more_____

II. Self-esteem, Attitudes towards school and Peer relations.

Please answer each item as carefully and accurately as possible

by placing the appropriate number in the space following each question.

1. Most or all of the time.
2. Some of the time.
3. A little of the time.
4. None of the time.

1. I feel that people would not like me if they knew me._____
2. I feel that I am a beautiful person._____

3. I feel that others get along much better than I do. _____
4. I feel that people really like to talk to me. _____
5. I feel that I need more self-confidence. _____
6. I think my friends find me interesting. _____
7. I feel ugly. _____
8. I think I have a good sense of humor. _____
9. I feel I get pushed around more than others. _____
10. I think I am a rather nice person. _____
11. I get along very well with my peers. _____
12. My peers act like they don't care. _____
13. My peers really seem to respect me. _____
14. My peers treat me badly. _____
15. My peers really understand me. _____
16. I hate my present peer group. _____
17. My peers seem to like having me around. _____
18. I really feel like I am disliked by my peer. _____
19. My peers seem to look down on me. _____
20. My peers seem to think I am important. _____
21. I really enjoy coming to school. _____
22. I do not like my teachers. _____
23. I feel that I can really learn at school. _____
24. I hate school. _____
25. I feel that school is important. _____
26. I feel school is dumb. _____
27. I like the school I attend. _____
28. I feel I do not learn in school. _____

29. I like to talk about school. _____

30. I think school is a waste of time. _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION IN COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!!!!

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